

# Gold windfall? No, it's a fake

By Roger Boye

**M**ore questions from Tribune readers are answered this week.

**Q —** At a garage sale this summer we bought a box filled with odds and ends. In it we found a small coin that says, "\$5 in gold, San Francisco, 1855." Did we strike it rich?  
— T.L. Evanston.

**A —** Sorry, but your coin is probably a worthless fake. Here's the background:

As settlers moved to California in the mid-1800s, several West Coast businessmen minted their own gold pieces to relieve an acute shortage of

government money. Such "private gold coins" are exceedingly rare today, almost always selling for \$1,000 and up.

The high prices have prompted many hucksters to produce imitation gold coins in an attempt to make a fast buck. The fakes are usually made of brass or other cheap metal, often coated with a gold alloy.

Some experts say that almost all "private gold coins" owned by neophyte collectors are the worthless imitation. To be sure about your piece, have it examined by a coin dealer or other expert.

**Q —** I have a \$1 bill with the words "printed in USA" in the lower left-hand margin. Can this bill be of any value? I've checked many bills, but have never seen another one like it. — M.P., Chicago.

**A —** Someone with access to printing equipment put those words on your bill as a joke. It has no value to a collector.